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ABSTRACT

Each school day, hundreds of thousands of students are missing from their classrooms--many without a bona fide excuse. Left unchecked, truancy is a risk factor for serious juvenile delinquency. Truancy's impact also extends into the adult years where it has been linked to numerous negative outcomes. Consequently, it is critical to identify strategies that intervene effectively with youth who are chronically truant and that interrupt their progress to delinquency and other negative behaviors by addressing the underlying reasons behind their absence from school. This bulletin provides an overview of the problem of truancy; describes the correlations of family, school, economic, and student factors with truancy; notes truancy's role as a predictor of delinquency, including juvenile daytime crime; and tallies truancy's social and financial impacts. Two projects funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention are featured: the ACT Now program operated by the Pima County Attorney's Office in Arizona and the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program, a partnership with the Executive Office for Weed and Seed and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program. Truancy is an early warning sign for future problems and should not be ignored. (Contains 26 references.) (RT)

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JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School

Myriam L. Baker, Jane Nady Sigmon, and M. Elaine Nugent

Truancy, or unexcused absence from school, has been linked to serious delinquent activity in youth and to significant negative behavior and characteristics in adults.[1] As a risk factor for delinquent behavior in youth, truancy has been found to be related to substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993).

Much of the work in the area of developmental pathways to delinquency shows that these behavioral problems often are followed by progressively more serious behavioral and adjustment problems in adulthood, including an increased propensity for violent behavior (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Kelley et al., 1997). Further, adults who were frequently truant as teenagers are much more likely than those who were not to have poorer health and mental health, lower paying jobs, an increased chance of living in poverty, more reliance on welfare support, children who exhibit problem behaviors, and an increased likelihood of incarceration (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Hawkins and Catalano, 1995; Ingersoll and LeBoeuf, 1997; Rohrman, 1993).

Left unaddressed, truancy during the preteen and teenage years can have significant negative effects on the student, schools, and society. It is important to identify promising strategies to intervene with chronic truants, address the root causes of truancy, and stop youth's progression from truancy into more serious and violent behaviors.

This Bulletin highlights some of the major research findings regarding the problem of truancy and demonstrates why it is important that schools and communities work to prevent and reduce its incidence. It also discusses Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (TRDP) and the TRDP evaluation.

Overview of the Truancy Problem

Every day, hundreds of thousands of youth are absent from school; many are absent without an excuse and deemed truant. Although national data on truancy rates are not available (in part because no uniform definition of truancy exists), many large cities report staggering rates of truancy and chronic absenteeism.[2] Some large cities report that unexcused absences can number in the thousands

A Message From OJJDP

Each school day, hundreds of thousands of students are missing from their classrooms—many without a bona fide excuse.

Left unchecked, truancy is a risk factor for serious juvenile delinquency. Truancy's impact also extends into the adult years where it has been linked to numerous negative outcomes. Consequently, it is critical to identify strategies that intervene effectively with youth who are chronically truant and that interrupt their progress to delinquency and other negative behaviors by addressing the underlying reasons behind their absence from school.

This Bulletin provides an overview of the problem of truancy; describes the correlations of family, school, economic, and student factors with truancy; notes truancy's role as a predictor of delinquency, including juvenile daytime crime; and tallies truancy's social and financial impacts.

Two OJJDP-funded projects are featured: the ACT Now program operated by the Pima County Attorney's Office in Arizona and the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program, a partnership with the Executive Office for Weed and Seed and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program.

Truancy is an early warning sign for future problems and should not be ignored. This Bulletin should assist our efforts to give it the attention it requires.

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on certain days (Heaviside et al., 1998). In Detroit, MI, for example, school attendance officials investigated 66,440 complaints of chronic absenteeism during the 1994–95 school year, and in Chicago, IL, the average 10th grader missed 6 weeks of instructional time during the 1995–96 school year (Garry, 1996; Roderick et al., 1997). A national review of discipline issues in schools conducted in 1996–97 found that public school principals identified student absenteeism, class cutting, and tardiness as the top discipline problems in their schools (Heaviside et al., 1998).

In general, the proportion of truancy cases handled in juvenile court is relatively small. However, the juvenile justice system is increasingly serving as the final stop for truants and as a mechanism for intervening with chronic truants. Recent statistics available on the extent of truancy cases in juvenile court clearly demonstrate how important it is for schools and communities to confront this issue. In 1998, truancy accounted for 26 percent of all formally handled status offense cases, representing an 85-percent increase in truancy cases in juvenile court since 1989 (from 22,200 cases in 1989 to 41,000 cases in 1998) (Puzzanchera et al., forthcoming).

A closer look reveals that the number of petitioned truancy cases around the country is about evenly divided between boys and girls and that whereas the majority of petitioned truancy cases involve 15-year-olds, there have been petitioned cases involving boys and girls as young as 10 (Puzzanchera et al., forthcoming).

Correlates of Truancy

Preliminary findings from OJJDP's evaluation of TRDP (see page 9) confirm previous findings that, in general, the correlates of truancy fall into four broad categories:

- **Family factors.** These include lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic violence, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse in the home, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and differing attitudes toward education.
- **School factors.** These include school climate issues—such as school size and attitudes of teachers, other students, and administrators—and inflexibility in meeting the diverse cultural and learning styles of the students. Schools often have inconsistent procedures in place for dealing with chronic absenteeism and may not have meaningful consequences available for truant youth (e.g., out-of-school suspension).
- **Economic influences.** These include employed students, single-parent homes, high mobility rates, parents who hold multiple jobs, and a lack of affordable transportation and childcare.
- **Student variables.** These include drug and alcohol abuse, lack of understanding of attendance laws, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties, and poor physical health.

Although not mentioned specifically, the community significantly influences the occurrence of truancy as well. Community factors are folded into the above four areas. For example, economic conditions and differing culturally based attitudes toward education are also important factors in the community.

Predictor of Delinquency

Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure. Several studies have established lack of commitment to school as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993). Decades of research have also identified a link between truancy and later problems such as violence, marital problems, job problems, adult criminality, and incarceration (Dryfoos, 1990; Catalano et al., 1998; Robins and Ratcliff, 1978; Snyder and Sickmund, 1995).

More recent studies, such as OJJDP's Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency,[3] indicate that truancy may be a precursor to serious violent and nonviolent offenses and that the connection between truancy and delinquency appears to be particularly acute among males (Kelley et al., 1997). In addition, findings from OJJDP's Study Group on Very Young Offenders indicate that chronic truancy in elementary school is linked to serious delinquent behavior at age 12 and under (Loeber and Farrington, 2000).

Juvenile Daytime Crime

In several jurisdictions, law enforcement officials have linked high rates of truancy to daytime burglary and vandalism (Baker, 2000). Before TRDP started, for example, police in Tacoma, WA (one of OJJDP's TRDP sites), reported that one-third of burglaries and one-fifth of aggravated assaults occurring between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. on weekdays were committed by juveniles. In Contra Costa County, CA (another TRDP site), police reported that 60 percent of juvenile crime occurred between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. on weekdays. These daytime juvenile crime rates were a primary reason that sites began implementing TRDP.

Social and Financial Impact

Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and because truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school, they have high dropout rates as well (Dynarski

and Gleason, 1999). The consequences of dropping out of school are well documented. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than youth who stay in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). According to a recent report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001:2), "6.0 percent of workers with a high school diploma were in poverty [in 1999], considerably lower than the proportion of those who had not completed high school (14.3 percent)." High school dropouts are also more likely to depend on welfare, experience unstable marriages, and serve time in prison than those who complete their schooling (Snyder and Sickmund, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

The financial impact of truancy and the dropouts that result can be measured in a number of ways:

- Less educated workforce.
- Business loss because of youth who "hang out" and/or shoplift during the day.
- Higher daytime crime rates (in some cases).
- Cost of social services for families of children who are habitually truant.

Truancy, however, has an even more direct financial impact on communities: the loss of Federal and State education funding.

OJJDP's Response to Truancy

OJJDP is committed to identifying what works in preventing and reducing truancy and has supported numerous truancy initiatives and evaluations, two of which are described in the sections that follow: ACT Now—a prosecutor-led program in Pima County, AZ—and TRDP.

The ACT Now Program

The Pima County Attorney's Office (PCAO) in Arizona is among the many prosecutors' offices nationwide that have recognized truancy as a significant problem and designed alternatives to adjudication by intervening with truants to prevent subsequent delinquent and criminal behavior.

Pima County, located in the southeastern portion of Arizona, is the second most populous county in the State, with an estimated population of more than 780,000 people. More than half of the population lives in Tucson, the county seat. Between 1991 and 1995, Pima County's truancy rates were among the highest in the State, accounting for more than 50 percent of the State's chronic truancies (Bernat, 1996). In addition to high truancy rates, Pima County's juvenile arrest rates were higher than the State average (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 1996). Statistics also showed that in 1993, 8,720 juveniles were referred to the Juvenile Court Center, and between 1993 and 1996, the number of referrals increased approximately 23 percent, to 10,773. Since 1993, the most frequent type of referral (accounting for roughly one-quarter of all referrals) has been for status offenses, which include truancy.[4]

During 1993 and 1994, a statewide working group in Arizona focused attention on youth crime and developed recommendations for prevention and early intervention. To address truancy and youth crime, the group recommended approaches that focus on the root causes of poor school attendance, such as lack of parental control due to insufficient parenting skills, child abuse or neglect in the home, and family instability. The group also suggested that requiring parents to ensure that their children are supervised and holding parents accountable would increase school attendance and decrease juvenile crime. The working group's recommendations resulted in an amendment to the State compulsory school attendance law to include criminal sanctions for parents or guardians who do not ensure that their children attend school.

To address key risk factors associated with youth crime—poor school attendance and truancy—one of the working group members, PCAO's deputy county attorney, initiated the development of a PCAO truancy diversion program. Armed with the new law that strengthened the enforcement of the existing compulsory school attendance statute by creating criminal fines and penalties for parents, PCAO formulated its truancy plan to include three key elements:

- Enforcement of the mandatory attendance law by holding parents accountable.
- Provision of a diversion program that offers services to address the root causes of truancy.
- Sanctions for parents and youth for continued truancy or failure to complete the diversion program successfully.

Critical to the truancy program's success would be the active participation of school districts, local schools, law enforcement offices, and community agencies, all of which have some responsibility for educating, providing services to, assisting, or intervening with youth.

Armed with a vision, a concrete plan, and printed materials, PCAO invited more than 100 key stakeholders to convene and discuss the problem of truancy. The traditional response to truancy in the county had been to process the youth through the juvenile court, which often resulted in diversion with no consequences. As a result, school administrators had lacked confidence in the process and welcomed the new law and the new strategy for addressing truancy. With the interest and support of school administrators, PCAO moved forward with its program for the 1994–95 school year. The program, Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now, became a cooperative effort among PCAO, the schools, law enforcement, and community organizations/agencies that provide services to youth and families.

During the initial stages, no community agency was available to partner with PCAO to provide case management or services to truant youth and their families. Thus, in the first program year, PCAO received referrals directly from schools and coordinated the diversion program. A community-based nonprofit agency, the Center for Juvenile Alternatives (CJA), was established in spring 1995 in Pima County to provide an alternative to the institutional detention of status offenders, to take on case management responsibilities for the ACT Now program, and to provide services as part of the program to youth and their families. During the latter half of 1995, CJA became firmly established, and ACT Now became a fully coordinated interagency response to truancy.[5]

As envisioned, ACT Now was to create and implement a sound, uniform enforcement plan that would not require significant investment of resources. The expressed purpose of the program was to return the habitually truant minor to school through the coordination and cooperation of participating schools, prosecution, law enforcement, and CJA. ACT Now is grounded in the philosophy that a breakdown in parental supervision has occurred, resulting in truancy, curfew violations, and juvenile involvement in a wide range of criminal and other unacceptable behaviors. The program design consists of several steps:

- Participating schools monitor attendance closely and, after the first unexcused absence, send a letter to parents advising them of the potential for prosecution.[6] The letter states that the school is working in close cooperation with PCAO's Truancy Enforcement Program and that if the youth has at least three unexcused absences, his or her attendance record will be forwarded to the program.
- After the third unexcused absence, a truancy referral form with identifying data and other background information, the youth's official attendance record, and a notarized affidavit certifying the unexcused absences are sent to CJA.[7]
- Upon referral, parents are notified that they may be subject to misdemeanor prosecution and their child to filing of a truancy petition in juvenile court. Parents are offered the opportunity to participate in a diversion program and are asked to contact CJA.
- Upon contacting CJA, parents or guardians are offered a deferred prosecution diversion program and asked to sign a written contract outlining terms of the agreement.
- The parents who accept deferred prosecution are referred to community agencies that provide access to counseling, parenting skills classes, and support groups for the youth and parents. Referrals are made based on CJA's psychosocial evaluations of truants and their families to determine the root causes of the truancy.
- Successful adherence to the terms of the deferred prosecution contract by parents results in case dismissal.[8]

Process and Implementation Outcomes

In 1996, OJJDP awarded a grant to the American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI) to conduct an evaluation of ACT Now. Full evaluation results, documenting both the implementation process and program outcomes, are found in *Abolish Chronic Truancy Now Diversion Program: Evaluation Report* (Sigmon, Nugent, and Engelhardt-Greer, 1999).[9]

APRI's process evaluation documented the planning, implementation, evolution, and operation of ACT Now from the time the program was initiated through the 1997–98 school year. Evaluation results indicate that, while the program's purpose—to prevent chronic truancy by holding parents accountable and offering deferred prosecution along with services—has held constant since its inception, the program's operation evolved significantly in its first 2 years, resulting in improved practice and expanded reach. The following components of the ACT Now program appear to have contributed to its successful implementation:

- Clearly stated goals and objectives that address a problem of concern to community stakeholders and provide a basis for a program in which communities can participate.
- Consistent written guidelines on program procedures, including sample letters to parents (in both English and Spanish) and referral forms.
- Annual training for key school administrators who can discuss program goals and procedures; provision of CJA and PCAO contacts who can answer school administrators' questions about referrals throughout the year.
- Clear delegation of the development of an attendance policy and the determination of when a student is truant to school officials.
- Establishment of a minimum number of absences before a student is referred to CJA, while recognizing local school decisionmaking in determining when a referral is appropriate.
- Use of a new source of leverage in responding to truancy (the threat of parental prosecution) and a consistent response when schools refer parents of truant students to CJA after a minimum of three unexcused absences.
- A coordinated response that includes services to address the underlying causes of truancy.
- Allocation of CJA and PCAO staff, who work cooperatively with schools and law enforcement agencies in coordinating a communitywide response to truancy.
- Enforcement of attendance statutes to send a consistent message to parents and youth regarding the seriousness of truancy.
- Effective use of media coverage of the program and its associated truancy

American Prosecutors Research Institute

The American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI) is a nonprofit research and program development resource that provides prosecutors with training and curriculum development, technical assistance, and consultation services and also produces publications and conducts research. Since its inception in 1984, APRI has become a vital resource and national clearinghouse for information on the prosecutorial function and has supplied the field with interdisciplinary responses to the complex problems of crime and delinquency. For more information, visit APRI's Web site at www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/index.html.

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sweeps to increase the community's awareness of truancy, its consequences, and efforts to combat it.

Two key shortcomings of the program were identified. First, at the time of the evaluation, the program had not implemented a consistent method for providing timely feedback to schools about the status of their referrals to CJA and the intervention's outcome or whether a case was being prosecuted. Second, the computerized database and case tracking system originally envisioned by PCAO did not materialize, and the collection of data to track cases and monitor program outcomes and effectiveness was not fully implemented until fall 1997. Although the program has taken steps to address both issues, evaluators recommended continued improvement in these two areas. Conscientious followthrough with all program participants is required for the program to be effective in the future.

The successful cooperation and collaboration among agencies involved in the program have contributed significantly to the program's success and represent an unintended consequence of its implementation. As a result of these activities, community stakeholders have developed new links that will serve as the basis for future joint activities of benefit to the community.

Evidence of Effectiveness

APRI focused on answering several key questions about the program's effectiveness by collecting data on attendance rates (year-end attendance), number of truancies and dropouts, referrals to CJA and PCAO, services provided to youth and their families, and successful program completion/case disposition. A sample of four participating school districts was selected for a more indepth analysis of service delivery outcomes in the 1997–98 school year and attendance/truancy patterns over time. The key questions (and findings) of this evaluation follow.

What impact has ACT Now had on school response to truancy and reporting practices? The number of truancy referrals has increased steadily (from 46 in the 1994–95 school year to 332 in the 1997–98 school year) as has the number of schools making referrals to ACT Now. Data indicate that since the program's pilot phase in 1995–96, program awareness has increased and truancy reporting has improved. In the years prior to full program implementation (1994–95 and 1995–96), there were few truancy referrals. During this time, schools made referrals directly to PCAO, and the policy of systematic dissemination of information to referring schools was not yet in place. When ACT Now became fully operational and reporting procedures were formalized, the number of schools reporting truancies (and the ratio of schools that reported to those that participated) increased substantially. This increase is a strong indication of school administrators' confidence in the program and reflects significant change in reporting processes.

How does the threat of prosecution affect whether parents ensure that their children attend school? Evaluators looked at two measures to determine the answer to this question: (1) the number of advisory letters sent to parents compared with the number of subsequent referrals to CJA; and (2) PCAO prosecution of parents. APRI hypothesized that if the process has an effect on parental accountability, the number of referrals should be less than the number of advisory letters sent to parents, indicating that action had been taken to address the truancy. Participating schools countywide sent a total of 2,870 advisory letters to parents or guardians of truant youth between 1995 and 1998. During the same period, schools made 1,118 referrals to CJA based on the parents' or guardians' failure to address truancy, a number substantially less than the number of advisory letters sent. Thus, the threat of prosecution prompted 61 percent of parents or guardians to take corrective action. When the effect on parental response is examined by school year, however, a marked decrease is seen between the 1995–96 and 1996–97 school years—in 1995–96, 86 percent of parents took corrective action, as compared with only 21 percent in 1996–97. This variation over time can be attributed to a number of changes that were occurring in the program.

The decrease in the number of advisory letters sent by schools and in subsequent program referrals between the 1995–96 and the 1996–97 school years can be linked to the fact that ACT Now had not yet been formalized in 1995–96. Also, the 1995–96 school year was the first year that schools referred truancies directly to CJA rather than PCAO. CJA offered very little outreach to the schools during this time to explain their role or to build confidence among school administrators in the procedures. Both factors may account for the decrease in parental response in the 1996–97 school year. After the program procedures were more clearly articulated to school administrators, the number of advisory letters sent and parental response to the letters increased.

Truants whose parents failed to address the attendance problem or participate in the ACT Now program were referred by CJA to PCAO for prosecution. Between 1994 and 1998, PCAO handled 674 truancy cases. The number of such defendants increased over time, from 50 in 1994–95 to 372 in 1997–98. Between the 1995–96 and 1996–97 school years, the number of defendants increased 171 percent (from 68 to 184); similarly, a 102-percent increase in the number of defendants occurred between the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years (from 184 to 372). Overall, nearly 65 percent of the cases represented truants between ages 13 and 15, and 22 percent involved truants between ages 10 and 12. The youngest truants, ages 6 to 9, represented approximately 11 percent of the cases.

Using prosecutorial discretion, PCAO did not file charges in all 674 cases. An analysis of PCAO truancy case processing by school year shows that the majority of cases were closed with no disposition, primarily because a parent or guardian could not be located. More than half of the cases were closed in school years 1994–95 and 1995–96. By the 1996–97 school year, the number of cases closed without PCAO action decreased, and more parents were prosecuted, specifically:

- In school year 1994–95, 27 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- In school year 1995–96, 23 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- In school year 1996–97, 41 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- In school year 1997–98, 41 percent of cases were prosecuted.

Of those cases that were not closed by PCAO, the majority resulted in guilty pleas, and of those that were resolved through a bench trial, 98 percent were found guilty. The most commonly imposed sanctions included community service or a $200 fine. In ACT Now's initial phase (during the 1994 to 1996 school years), almost half of those prosecuted (42.9 percent) were sentenced to perform community service and slightly more than one-third (35.7 percent) were fined.

By the 1996–97 school year, the range of sanctions had expanded to include higher

fines—between $300 and $500—suggesting a stronger attempt by the juvenile court and PCAO to hold parents accountable. In fact, during this period the number of parents/guardians who took corrective action to address the truancy before being referred for prosecution increased substantially. Fewer community service sanctions and more sentences of unsupervised probation and payment of fines were imposed. One explanation for the change in types of sanctions imposed is that the community service option did not work as originally planned. Under the initial program plans, schools were to develop community service projects at the school for parents to complete as part of their sentence. Schools were reluctant and, as a result, few developed such projects. Anecdotal information gathered during site visits and through telephone interviews indicates that because the community service concept did not work as planned, it was phased out as a sentencing option.

Are truant youth and their parents or guardians receiving adequate services to address the root causes of the truancy? CJA conducts an intake assessment before making any service referrals. Services are tailored to the specific needs of truant youth and their families to address the root causes of truancy in addition to other factors related to family social and physical health. Services range from assessments to evaluations to counseling to living assistance. In the 1995–96 school year, CJA staff made only 197 service referrals, but by the following school year, the number of referrals had increased to 593.[10] The majority of referrals were for counseling, intensive case management services, and participation in the ACT Well class, a 6-hour program designed to provide information to youth and parents and help them build skills to prevent truancy. The increase in referrals continued in the 1997–98 school year; the majority of the 714 referrals made were for intake assessment followed by other services, such as counseling, case management, and conflict resolution.

To further assess service delivery, additional individual-level data were collected for the four school districts in the evaluation sample. In the 1997–98 school year, the first year individual-level data were available, 394 youth from the four school districts included in the evaluation were referred to CJA. CJA recommended services for more than half of all the youth referred. Services were recommended only for those youth whose parents responded either to the first or second CJA advisory letter (57 percent).

Of the parents who did not respond to the letters, more than one-third were referred for parental prosecution. For others of these parents (roughly 10 percent), the case was closed and no recommendations were made because the parents or youth could not be located or had moved, the youth was in an out-of-home placement, the youth was being home schooled, or the school withdrew the referral. Of the youth who were referred to services, 79 percent successfully completed the program and the charges were dismissed. As shown in the table below, parental response to the first letter from CJA is a strong predictor of successful program completion.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the provision of services has a lasting effect on subsequent truancy and parental supervision. In the 1997–98 school year, only 33 of the 394 youth (8 percent) referred from the four school districts in the sample were recidivists, suggesting that ACT Now and related services have an effect on truancy.[11] Ideally, tracking youth individual-level data to assess prior performance in the program would provide a further indication of the strength of the relationship between successful program completion and recidivism. However, the data available for this evaluation were insufficient for such indepth analysis.

How has the number of truancies and dropouts changed during the program? Two variables were used to assess changes in truancy and dropout rates: school reports of the number of truancies and the cumulative number of dropouts. Data were collected from PCAO and the four sample school districts for the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years to determine whether the number of truancies had changed.[12]

Each school district showed a decrease in the number of truancies between the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years, ranging from a decrease of 64 percent in the largest school district to 4 percent in the smallest. The truancy rate for the largest district in the sample originally had been among the highest in the State, and thus the observed decrease is dramatic.

Another measure of the program's effectiveness was the examination of recidivism. Because truancy data on individuals were unavailable, APRI used the number of dropouts as a proxy variable for subsequent, chronic truant behavior (i.e., recidivism). If ACT Now is effective in addressing chronic truancy, there should be a decrease in the number of dropouts relative to the number of truancies being reported. Such a finding would provide initial support for the hypothesis that ACT Now is effective in breaking the cycle of truancy before it leads to dropping out of school. With the exception of the two smaller school districts, both of which experienced a slight increase in the number of dropouts, the cumulative number of truancies and dropouts decreased from the 1996–97 to the 1997–98 school year. In addition, the largest decrease in dropouts correlated with the largest decrease in truancy rates.

Although these figures suggest that ACT Now is effective in reducing chronic truancy and school dropouts, no further concrete conclusions can be drawn from these data because the number of truancies reported does not equal the number of youth who have been truant. Truancy data on individuals are necessary to determine whether the proportion of dropouts to truants has changed over time. Moreover, without individual truancy and dropout data, it is impossible to make

Relationship Between Parents' Response to Letters and Completion of Program (1997–98 School Year)

Response to Letter	Program Successfully Completed		Program Not Completed		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
First	119	86.2	19	13.8	138	100
Second	34	73.9	12	26.1	46	100
Total	153	83.2	31	16.8	184	100

Note: Chi-square=3.737; p=0.05.

concrete statements about the relationship between truancy and dropping out of school.

Overall Assessment

ACT Now has developed into an institutionalized response to truancy in Pima County. The schools, law enforcement, PCAO, service providers, and the local media see the program as an integral part of the community's efforts to address truancy and associated problems that put youth at high risk of serious delinquent behavior.

Overall, ACT Now has become a new source of leverage for schools to respond to truancy and has allowed for a more consistent response when schools make referrals to CJA. Critical to this process was the establishment of a minimum number of absences before a referral was made and a recognition of local schools' decision-making authority in determining when a referral is appropriate. In addition, the relationships built among the schools, law enforcement, the juvenile court, and PCAO are an important program outcome.

The outcome evaluation supports APRI's finding that ACT Now has resulted in a coordinated response to truancy that is embraced by the schools, law enforcement, the prosecutor, and the courts. This response is evidenced by the number of truancy sweeps, CJA referrals, services provided to youth and their parents, parental prosecutions, guilty pleas, and the increasing monetary sanctions imposed. ACT Now also appears to have an effect on parental accountability and school attendance.

This evidence, however, must be interpreted carefully, as it is based primarily on aggregate data. Individual data on truants, parents, and recidivism would provide stronger evidence. In addition, information from parents regarding their perceptions of the ACT Now program and its impact on their supervision of school attendance would further enhance the current evaluation's findings.

Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program

In 1998, OJJDP, the Executive Office for Weed and Seed, and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program initiated a demonstration grant program for truancy reduction.[13] In developing the structure of their truancy reduction effort, OJJDP and its partnering agencies relied on lessons learned from and key principles of other truancy and risk prevention initiatives that have shown promising results.

A comprehensive, collaborative model that targets the reduction of risk factors associated with incidence of truancy was suggested by the Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) Initiative[14] and is further supported in the literature (Catalano et al., 1998; Dryfoos, 1990; Morley and Rossman, 1997; Schorr, 1997). The models that show the most promise, not only of reducing truancy, but also of affecting its risk factors, include several key components:

- Parental involvement.
- Meaningful sanctions or consequences for truancy.
- Meaningful incentives for school attendance.
- Ongoing school-based truancy reduction programs.
- Involvement of community resources (e.g., law enforcement).

Based on her extensive work with successful prevention models targeting at-risk youth and families across the country, Schorr (1997) concludes such programs must:

- Be comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering.
- View children in the context of their families.
- Deal with families as parts of neighborhoods and communities.
- Have a long-term, preventive orientation and a clear mission and continue to evolve over time.
- Be well managed by competent and committed individuals with clearly identifiable skills.
- Have staff who are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services.
- Operate in settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

One of the most important elements of any effective prevention effort is the existence of a collaborative partnership of public agencies, community organizations, and concerned individuals that interact with and provide services to truant youth and their families. OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders highlights the critical need for this collaboration: "Comprehensive, communitywide prevention requires collaboration and resource sharing. In most communities, barriers must be broken down and collaborative bridges built among and within agencies, organizations, and groups with responsibility for addressing juvenile delinquency" (Howell, 1995:26). For example, schools need to interact more effectively with community organizations (businesses, senior organizations, local government, social services organizations, health agencies, and civic organizations) to achieve their educational goals. Such collaboration needs to exist within the school system as well—among teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, special education teachers, parents, and students (Howell, 1995).

TRDP Demonstration Sites

In 1998, OJJDP solicited applications from communities that were engaged in integrated, communitywide plans to reduce truancy. Applicants were required to outline a comprehensive program that included four major components:

- A continuum of services to support truant youth and their families.
- System reform and accountability.
- Data collection (from schools, agencies, courts) and evaluation.
- A community education and awareness program that addresses the need to prevent truancy and intervene with truant youth.

In 1999, OJJDP awarded funds to eight sites, a mixture of Weed and Seed and non-Weed and Seed sites (one, Georgia, declined to apply for continuation after the first year). The seven remaining sites are diverse in geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and community-based leadership. Common to the truant population at all sites is the high representation of minority students and families and of students and families living in poverty.

Sites received either $50,000 or $100,000 per year for 3 years. The disparity in funding was due to the assumption that the Weed and Seed sites (funded at $50,000) would need less money for start-up and planning because the program would exist within the local Weed and Seed effort. While the demonstration

Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) is a private, nonprofit organization that promotes the health, education, and well-being of children and families through research, program development, and evaluation of promising community-based activities. CFFC accomplishes this by assisting in the formation of partnerships between governmental and private entities to support the community implementation of effective practices. In addition to evaluating TRDP, CFFC oversees the evaluation of several truancy projects in Colorado. For more information, visit CFFC's Web site at www.coloradofoundation.org. For information about CFFC's evaluation of TRDP, visit www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject.

sites/programs listed below were being chosen, OJJDP selected the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) as the national evaluator of this project.

Department of Health and Human Services/Weed and Seed Office, Contra Costa County, CA. Contra Costa County is building on its Weed and Seed efforts to implement a program targeting ninth grade students with a history of chronic truancy and their families. An onsite probation officer will deliver the intervention by assessing families and youth and referring them to appropriate resources within the school and community.

State Attorney's Office, Jacksonville, FL. The State Attorney's Office provides a precourt diversion program for truant youth and their families. The school district refers families to the program when chronic truancy has not been solved by school-based intervention. Following the referral, a hearing is conducted with the parent, youth, school attendance social worker, and volunteer hearing officer. A contract is negotiated that includes plans for reducing truancy and accessing services and community supports. A case manager makes home visits and monitors the family's compliance with the plan. In the fall of 2000, a school-based component was added to address prevention and early intervention at two elementary schools, where an onsite case manager monitors attendance and provides early outreach.

Clarke County School District (Weed and Seed site), Athens, GA. Clarke County's Reducing Truancy in Middle Grades program employed a case manager who worked directly with students at two middle schools to identify youth with five or more unexcused absences. The case manager made home visits, called parents, and facilitated parent-teacher conferences to assess the causes of truancy. The case manager provided referrals to community-based resources and some direct services to families. In addition, students and families who did not respond to the program's case management approach were summoned to appear before an attendance panel. This site declined to apply for continuation after the first year and is no longer participating in TRDP.

University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI. The University of Hawaii is building on a previous program to prevent truancy in the Wai'anae area. Attendance officers in two elementary schools work to provide early outreach to young students and their families when absences become chronic. Community resources are used to address the issues that may prevent youth from attending school regularly. In addition, the schools work with the Honolulu police department to provide Saturday truancy workshops for youth with chronic truancy problems and their families.

Suffolk County Probation Department (Weed and Seed site), Yaphank, NY. Suffolk County's South Country Truancy Reduction Program, which builds on community policing efforts, targets elementary and middle school students who have illegal absences. A probation officer monitors attendance in collaboration with school personnel, facilitates access to school and community-based services needed by the student and family to establish regular school attendance, and observes attendance and other school-based indicators to ensure that the student's attendance and engagement at school are improving. A similar model is in existence at the local high school.

Mayor's Anti-Gang Office (Weed and Seed site), Houston, TX. The Mayor's Anti-Gang Office placed an experienced case manager in one high school to identify students with chronic truancy patterns. Through home visits and school-based supports, students and their families are provided with services, support, and resources to address truancy. The program also works with community police officers, who provide a "knock and talk" service for youth and their families when truancy continues to be an issue. The officers assess family functioning and deliver information about the law and truancy outcomes; they also issue the official summons to court for a truancy petition.

King County Superior Court, Seattle, WA. After a truancy petition is filed, families have the option of attending

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an evening workshop, participating in a community truancy board hearing, or proceeding to court on the charges. The workshop includes education about truancy law and outcomes and facilitates planning between the parent and youth for addressing the cause of truancy. Community truancy boards composed of local community members hear the case, develop a plan for use with the youth and family, and monitor compliance with the stipulated agreement. In the fall of 2000, a school-based component was added to address prevention and early intervention.

Safe Streets Campaign (Weed and Seed site), Tacoma, WA. The Tacoma truancy project is based in one middle school where an onsite coordinator monitors attendance and connects youth and their families with community resources to address the underlying causes of truancy. This program works in tandem with law enforcement officials and a truancy center, to which truant youth are delivered and then assessed after pickup by community police officers.

The National Evaluation

The goal of the evaluation of TRDP is to describe the process by which interagency community-based coalitions develop, implement, and sustain effective truancy reduction efforts. Sites work with the national evaluator to accomplish the goals of the evaluation. By design, these efforts are intended to build on the community's strengths: its service organizations, social support agencies, businesses, parents, youth, and religious organizations. In addition, programs should enhance the awareness of the community, policymakers, and stakeholders that truancy prevention and reduction are necessary components of systemic support to keep youth in school and out of the juvenile justice system.

The evaluation has two main components: determining whether the programs reduce truancy and describing the role and processes of the community-based collaboratives driving the local programs. The collaboratives' processes also are being evaluated to help other sites in their implementation plans.

The design for program evaluation is multimodal. As sites implement their programs and begin to serve students and families, numeric and descriptive data are collected. Indicators for success evaluated across all sites include school attendance, school discipline, and academic achievement. Each site has been empowered to further tailor its individual evaluation to track additional outcomes that may be of local interest. For example, some sites are questioning participating students and families about their awareness of existing public outreach efforts to determine the efforts' efficacy in reaching the target audience.

A survey was administered early in program implementation to assess the type of information and level of detail that would be available from individual sites. This survey directly informed the empirical data collection strategy planned. Individual-level, schoolwide, and communitywide data on the following elements were requested:

- **Individual-level:** Demographics of the targeted students and their families and targeted students' school attendance, academic achievement, discipline incidents, and so forth.
- **Schoolwide:** Special education rates, data regarding free and reduced-price lunches, school completion/promotion rates, attendance rates, discipline statistics (e.g., suspension, expulsion, office referrals), academic achievement information, and dropout rates.
- **Communitywide:** Truancy petitions filed and cases heard (including breakdown by age, ethnicity, gender, and grade level of truant youth), daytime crime data (including arrests, gang activity, and commitments of youth to secure detention facilities), probation and diversion data, comparable data from a control group (i.e., another school), and other data involving issues such as substance abuse, child welfare, and mental health.

All sites may not have all of the data available; however, most key correlates and indicators are available to inform the evaluation.

Program Context

To date, contextual data describing the schools and communities in which the programs are situated indicate that primary correlates with truancy and school disengagement include poverty, low academic achievement, high mobility (e.g., moving from home to home, school to school), high rates of school discipline, and overrepresentation of special education eligibility.

Of the data elements requested, only attendance rates, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches, and special education rates were reported reliably. These data are provided in figure 1. Because school districts and States vary in the way such data are collected and counted, the consistency in measures across sites is not yet clear.

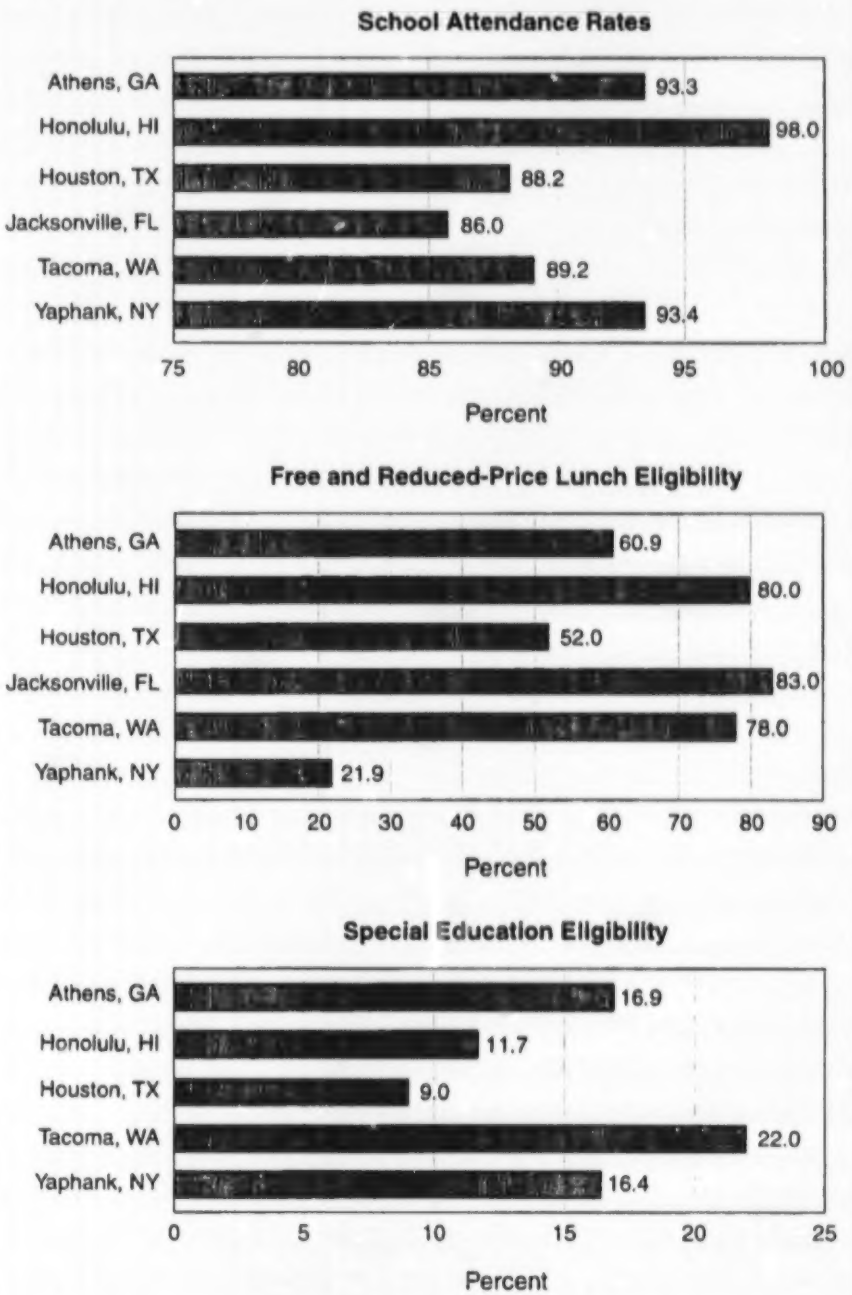
As an early activity in the evaluation, sites were asked to complete a logic model for their programs, identifying the targeted strengths and needs of the students, families, schools, and community. Sites used the model to frame the flow of needs assessment, program strategies, measurable milestones, and ultimate results. "Youth to be in school and succeeding" was unanimously identified as the expected result of the sites' truancy programs. Each site used the same logic model template to frame its assessment and plan. Because each site serves a different community and different target population, the strengths, needs, strategies, and milestones may differ from site to site. Figure 2 summarizes the commonalities found across sites (see page 11).

The Community-Based Collaboratives

The evaluation of community-based collaborative groups depends on multiple methods to gather information: a survey entitled *Working Together: A Profile of Collaboration* (Omni Institute, 1992), one-on-one telephone interviews, onsite group interviews, and site-based observations. The information collected during the first year is considered a baseline and will help evaluators understand the context in which each program exists.

Working Together measures the perceptions of group members in five key areas: context, structure, membership, process, and results. Survey results are intended to be used as a springboard for action planning. Evaluators administer the instrument annually and inform each site of the results on a yearly basis. During the first year that *Working Together* was administered, evaluators received 82 completed surveys (about 11 surveys

Figure 1: School-Based Context of TRDP



Note: Data unavailable for Contra Costa County, CA, and Seattle, WA. Special education data unavailable for Jacksonville, FL.

from each of the 7 participating sites). Representatives from law enforcement, courts, schools, mental health agencies, and community-based organizations completed the surveys. Figure 3 (page 12) shows that, on average, sites rated their performance and success in each area fairly high, with some differences.

Telephone interviews, which will be held annually, were conducted with participants from six sites in the first year.[15] A total of 24 interviews—approximately 4 per site—were completed with representatives from law enforcement, schools, courts, and community-based organizations who were active in the community-based groups. The interviews assessed participants' awareness of the local causes and correlates of truancy, their perceptions of the presence of needed partners in the collaborative task force, the state of interagency collaboration, and the need for policy change.

Interviewees all indicated their communities had been working on truancy issues for at least 2 years. As they reported, the causes of truancy, in general, fell into four broad categories: family factors, school factors, economic influences, and student variables (see page 2 for a more detailed discussion of these factors).

Interview respondents were asked to identify who should be the collaborative's key members (see figure 4, page 12). The majority identified law enforcement, youth services, juvenile justice agencies, schools, social services, and community-based organizations as important key members. Although very few mentioned parents, youth, the faith community, businesses, and social organizations, these individuals and organizations are also key members of truancy collaboratives.

Respondents were then asked if all needed partners identified above were at the table. The majority indicated that all necessary stakeholders were present (see figure 5, page 12); some realized they were missing important members of the community—typically identified were the faith and business communities.

Onsite interviews, which will be held annually, suggested that many of the collaboratives were unclear about their group vision or mission and hence about their goals and necessary steps to achieve goals.

Site-based observations are still being compiled, as some sites were not operational at the time this Bulletin was written. In addition, the operational sites did not always understand the purpose of requests for site visits during which "typical" activities would be observed. Hence, these data are still being collected in some cases.

Specific issues regarding jurisdiction, funding, and the sharing of information

Figure 2: Logic Model for TRDP Evaluation

Family	School	Student	Community
Strengths			
Communication between school and home Knowledge of home Knowledge of family needs	Afterschool resources available Information-sharing established with other agencies	Knowledge of school environment Desire to be in school and succeeding	Strong agency collaboration Available resources Community center Tutorial services Community attendance panel Clear laws Political support
Needs			
Basic • Housing • Employment • Childcare • Transportation Education and awareness • Parenting skills • Value of education • Community resources • Importance of parental involvement at school • Truancy and attendance laws Addressing cultural differences • Translation of services • Value of education Treatment • Mental health assessment • Family counseling • Substance abuse intervention	Positive school climate Education and awareness • Risk factors for truancy • Process for truancy referrals • Early intervention/prevention Services • Mentoring • Tutoring • Counseling • Mediation • Alternative programs • Afterschool programs Tracking and monitoring attendance Commitment by administration	Education and awareness • Consequences of truancy law • Value of education • Available resources Social/emotional skills • Adjustment to middle school/high school • Peer and family relationships • Coping strategies Behavioral support Academic support Attachment to school	Service agency coordination • Streamlined assessment and referral • Reduced duplication of services Culturally appropriate practices Involvement of all community partners • Police • Faith community • Business community Education/awareness/mobilization • Truancy law • Value of education • Truancy risk factors • Process across agencies
Strategies			
Assessment Resource referral Counseling Education Parenting programs	Technical assistance and training Grants to support efforts Cross-agency training Development of districtwide attendance policy Development of afterschool programs	Assessment Referral Peer programs Truancy education Education about consequences Social work interventions	Development of mission statement Assessment of collaborative Training conference Public awareness campaign Establishment of a task force Community training
Milestones			
Improved access to services Improved involvement in child's education Improved employment Access to childcare and transportation Understanding of truancy process Improved parenting skills 1,000 families served	Awareness of risk factors More efficient referrals Community truancy boards in place Conference planned Training disseminated to schools Understanding of truancy system Increased program referrals Improved monitoring of attendance More available services	Improved peer and family relationships Decreased behavior referrals Improved attendance Improved academics Improved access to services Improved attachment to school	Mission and work plan identified Contract made with schools Conference held Community awareness enhanced Public service announcements distributed Improved involvement and valuing of youth

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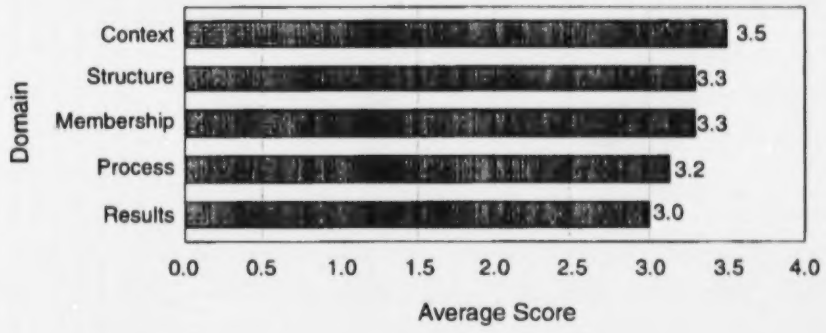
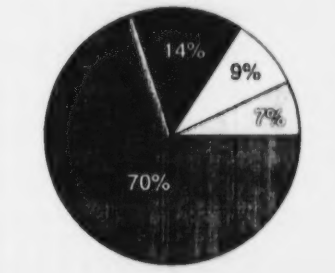
Figure 3: Results of Initial (First Year) Administration of *Working Together*



Note: *n*=82 responses. A score of 1=negative, 4=positive.

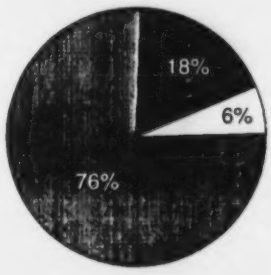
about youth and families are problematic for certain agencies and need to be dealt with from the start to enhance implementation of the program and the ongoing health of the coalition. As part of the planning process, collaboratives should identify the roles, responsibilities, and understandings among cooperating agencies and formalize agreements by using a memorandum of understanding. In addition, the collaboratives require continuing education and need to be made aware of the importance of involving the community at large—particularly parents, youth, the faith community, and local businesses. Parents and youth are required to be involved, and the faith and local business communities are key for volunteer, financial, and in-kind support through services. CFFC (as national evaluator) offers facilitation and action planning services to collaboratives. Such activities can greatly benefit these and future projects that are seated within a collaborative and multiagency setting; sites will be encouraged to use this service in the future.

Figure 4: Partners Identified as Necessary to Reducing Truancy


14%
9%
7%
70%
Law enforcement, youth services, juvenile justice agencies, schools, social services, community-based organizations
Truancy center, mental health organizations
State attorney, faith-based organizations, hospital, parents
Business community, youth, social organizations

Note: *n*=18 respondents.

Figure 5: Response to Question Regarding the Presence of Necessary Partners



Note: *n*=17 respondents.

Overall Assessment

TRDP's first year has yielded a strong base of information to direct the program's further development. Almost all of the participating sites need much more time, support, and training than anticipated to facilitate a successful start, both in program implementation and development and in maintenance of the community-based collaboratives directing the program.

Access to data, particularly across system lines (e.g., schools, courts, law enforcement), continues to require evaluation staff assistance in a variety of ways. To ensure that the data collected are consistent across sites and that they reflect the context in which the program exists, ongoing contact is crucial—especially site-based support on at least a semiannual basis. The national evaluators can facilitate information sharing and formalized agreements that might not otherwise occur so readily.

In addition, implementing culturally appropriate practices and obtaining family involvement continue to be troublesome for the sites. OJJDP has encouraged sites to use resources that can assist in developing strategies for improving practices in these areas.

Early in the project, the evaluation revealed commonalities in structure and planning processes among the seven participating programs, such as the existence of an extensive startup period and a strong community collaborative. After examining initial outcome data, evaluators will make available implications for best practices in the fall of 2001. Evaluators are tracking outcome data that focus on five target areas: student demographics, family demographics, a needs assessment, a service plan, and quarterly outcomes. Specific outcomes being measured include improvement in attendance and academics and reductions in office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and involvement with the juvenile justice department.

It is expected that the lessons learned from the diverse TRDP programs about establishing and maintaining effective community-based leadership and

interventions will guide future work by OJJDP and communities to prevent truancy.

Conclusion

Chronic truancy has long been identified as a key predictor for negative outcomes in education, employment, and social success. The correlates of chronic truancy continue to be holistic in nature and include family, school, economic, and student variables. Several promising programs are now in existence and, with the support of OJJDP, are making significant headway against the truancy problem.

Programs such as ACT Now and TRDP build on the strengths and resources within local communities to target truancy from a "carrot and stick" perspective. Students and families need both the incentive to attend school (the carrot) and meaningful consequences for chronic nonattendance (the stick). Truancy is a violation of State law as a status offense for the youth and educational neglect for the parent; addressing the underlying issues is necessary for long-term behavior change. Underlying issues that have been identified by these projects include family poverty, less education, substance abuse, cultural variation in the valuing of public education, and pressures on the youth to work and provide childcare for younger siblings.

Implementing a successful, sustainable truancy reduction project has its share of challenges, as illustrated by ACT Now and TRDP. Gaining consensus among schools to adopt a uniform definition of truancy and a standardized approach to the increase in school absences is a significant challenge. In addition, gaining cooperation from diverse key community players, such as law enforcement, courts, social services, parents, and community-based organizations, can be a challenging and time-consuming task. Finally, implementing effective, data-driven methods for tracking both the occurrence of truancy and the impact of programs on key indicators of success is a struggle for many programs.

Endnotes

1. The definition of truancy is usually established by school district policy and may vary across districts. For the purposes of this Bulletin, truancy is generally defined as an unexcused absence from school or class (i.e., an absence without the proper approval of appropriate school officials).

2. Generally, absentee rates are highest in public schools in the inner-city where larger numbers of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (Heaviside et al., 1998). (Higher truancy rates generally correlate with poverty; higher rates of free and reduced-price lunches are typically used as evidence of poverty.)

3. This series of long-term studies, which have followed thousands of at-risk youth in three cities for more than a decade, is designed to improve the understanding of serious delinquency, violence, and drug use by examining how youth develop within the context of family, school, peers, and community. For more details about this program, visit ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ccd.

4. Retrieved from the Web at www.sc.co.pima.az.us.

5. Seven school districts (not including the Tucson Unified School District) participate in ACT Now. Of these, the four most populous were selected to participate in the evaluation of ACT Now: Amphitheater, Sunnyside, Marana, and Flowing Wells. All four are located in the Tucson metropolitan area, and their total student enrollment represents approximately 77 percent of the Pima County public school students who are not enrolled in the Tucson Unified School District.

6. Because school attendance is monitored by an attendance clerk at each school, attendance clerks and local school administrators were key figures in program implementation.

7. The affidavit certifying the truant student's attendance record is a critical component of the prosecution strategy because it obviates the necessity of having school officials testify at court proceedings in each case. This plan represented a major inducement to school administrators, who did not relish the notion that staff time could be taken up with frequent court appearances.

8. Prior to the involvement of CJA, participating service providers were asked to submit information to PCAO verifying that referred parents had successfully completed the program and thus complied with the terms of the diversion agreement. Later, CJA monitored compliance with the terms of the diversion contract.

9. To order this publication, contact APRI's Research Unit at 703–549–4253 or visit its Web site, www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/Research_and_Development/Research_and_Development.html.

10. The number of referrals to various services does not represent the number of youth referred to such services. Youth often are referred to multiple services; however, referral data were only available in aggregate form, making it impossible to determine the actual number of youth who received services.

11. The 1997–98 school year marks the first year in which recidivism data were tracked.

12. Ideally, the evaluation would consider pretest truancy from the 1995–96 school year; however, reliable truancy data for that year were unavailable.

13. Weed and Seed is a community-based strategy combining law enforcement and human services to improve communities by reducing crime and revitalizing community involvement and resources. Weed and Seed requires an active and participating collaborative group, on which the grant program can theoretically build.

14. YOEM, which was a joint initiative of OJJDP and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, focused on truants, dropouts, and youth who were fearful of attending school, suspended or expelled, or in need of help to become reintegrated into mainstream schools from juvenile detention and correctional settings.

15. The exclusion of two sites was due to site-based difficulties with startup and interviewee accessibility.

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